

Statement of Support for HB 6461, HB 6462, HB 6640

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As a long-time advocate for affordable housing, especially affordable housing in areas which offer great education and employment opportunities, I urge you to support the above-referenced bills introduced by Rep. Rojas, and supported by the Open Communities Alliance. While I think all three bills deserve passage, space and time constraints limit my extensive remarks to HB 6461, AAC the Data Collection and Analysis of Affordable Housing.

Over the past several years, I have urged the General Assembly to require government agencies to collect and disseminate data on various aspects of public policy. The Hartford Courant has editorialized on numerous occasions that “Connecticut is a data desert.” The functions of data collection, quality-verifying, analysis and dissemination of data to the public and to its representatives – all tasks that a generation ago were being provided – have been over time the victim of short-sighted budget cuts. Even as demands have rightly risen for accountability and assessment of outcomes, the ability to evaluate success – or failure – has been undercut by the absence of data about important public policy issues. For example, today, no one can tell you how many full-time faculty and staff are employed in any of the public institutions of higher education. There is no accurate information about the number of students enrolled. In general, as David Walker and Fred Carstensen, from different parts of the political spectrum, observed in 2013,

Connecticut does a poor job in developing, sustaining, and evaluating data that tracks its performance and reveals the dynamics of its economy, population, and other crucial characteristics. This systematic weakness undermines not only the ability to formulate coherent and effective policy, but also disables the ability to respond to misleading studies that hurt the state’s perceived quality. [*Connecticut At Risk*, p.24, n. 41.]

Of course, this is not just a problem for the state. Last week, FBI Director James Comey observed that there is no national data about how many shootings occur by police officers. “It’s ridiculous that I can’t tell you how many people were shot by the police last week, last month, last year. Without complete and accurate data, we are left with ideological thunderbolts.”

Even with the Governor’s launch of the Connecticut Open Data Portal in early 2014, where raw data collected by state agencies is shared, and the ongoing efforts of the Connecticut Data Collaborative, which aims to improve the quality of policy-related data and access to it, knowledgeable policy-making is limited if no data is collected in the first place.

That’s especially true of data related to affordable housing. As Erin Boggs of the Open Communities Alliance will tell you in great detail,

- There is no comprehensive list of subsidized housing in the state,
- There are insufficient details about where units are located, the size of units, the year of construction, how units are paid for, the year of construction, etc.,
- Not all agencies that fund or finance subsidized housing are required to report information,
- The state is unable to assess whether plans to create affordable housing are effective.

To cure these defects, I join with the Open Communities Alliance to urge you to amend the statutes, or where appropriate to create new statutes, to extend the reach of data collection and reporting requirements to all state agencies providing, funding, financing or otherwise supporting subsidized housing. That is what HB 6461 would do.

As commentators have said on other occasions, if data are not collected, reported and used, government is flying blind – almost as if someone pulled the instrument panel out of a 747 and expected the pilot to land the plane safely.